

Big Lake BR&E Visitation Program Case Study

Project: Big Lake Passport Program

Background

In 2006, the Big Lake BR&E Task Force interviewed 40 local businesses to survey their perception on the community's strength and weaknesses. Four priority projects were identified to address the issues learned during the interviews:

1. Pursue workforce development strategies that a) retain and motivate young potential employees in Big Lake, and b) inform businesses of workforce attributes to aid recruitment
2. Form a Business Roundtable
3. Improve cultural and recreational opportunities by creating a "Passport" program for area residents and visitors
4. Strive to serve as a resource to the City of Big Lake Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Committee

This case study focuses on priority project #3: Creation of the Big Lake Passport Program.

In response to the negative answers of the BR&E survey regarding cultural opportunities, the project became to improve cultural and recreational opportunities in Big Lake by creating a "Passport" program for area residents and visitors.

The committee recognized that cultural opportunities were rated lower than any other community service. It was also recognized that cultural and recreational opportunities can be important components of both employee and business recruitment and retention, and contribute to the town's overall quality of life.

Project

The "Passport Program" was chosen to be an educational project which informs, and educates community members by promoting various cultural, entertaining, recreational and historical events happening in and around Big Lake.

Community members will have access to information about specific community events, businesses, landmarks and other activities. Those who choose may pick up an 'explorer' card at the Big Lake Chamber Office or download an 'explorer' card from www.biglakechamber.com/passport.

Explorers can keep track of their activities on the back of their card and turn filled cards in for a monthly drawing.

The project also includes a webpage designed to showcase area landmarks, sites, opportunities as well as a calendar of events. The time line is for the website to go 'live' is at the end of October 2008.

Challenges

The greatest challenge for the Passport committee was to get residents, businesses and organizations to respond to the task force group's many attempts to gather information for the community calendar and website. The task force advertised in the West Sherburne Tribune, City cable channel and Chamber Newsletter requesting residents and businesses owners send in pictures of their families doing activities around the City as well as Big Lake trivia questions. In order to have a comprehensive calendar of events and website, participation from all sectors is needed.

The group recognized time availability and lack of funding as being other challenges. The task force was made up of four volunteers and there was no one person whose sole responsibility was to oversee the development of the project. Task force members volunteered their time and resources to make the program a reality. Until funding for the program is available, the task force was able to use the Chamber of Commerce website to host the Passport Program and participants are asked to print off the passport cards from their home computer (passport cards are available at the Chamber of Commerce Office for those without access to the internet). During the past year, recruitment of new volunteers to contribute time and resource did not happen which put added work of the existing task force group.

Resources

The main resource needed to develop the Big Lake Passport program was volunteer time and creativity. As mentioned above, there was no funding to assist in gathering information for the website or producing passport cards so task force members depended greatly on contributions from task force members, volunteers and organizations.

The Sherburne County History Center played an instrumental role in providing information for the trivia and history sections of the passport program. Task force members used their Big Lake History publication to provide interesting facts and questions for the website.

Volunteers, as well as task force members, made a special effort to contact every organization and business in Big Lake to inform them of the community calendar and encourage them to submit meetings and events that were open to the public. It was the volunteers who directly contacted the organization, along with the many calls for request in various media outlets, which has contributed to the success of a comprehensive community calendar.

Results

The various aspects of the Passport Program (calendar of events, local landmark identification, historic trivia, photos) will accomplish the goal of the project which is to inform and educate community members and visitors by promoting various cultural, entertainment, recreational and historical events of Big Lake and the surrounding area.

Community Calendar

The creation of the community calendar that is accessible to all community members is beneficial in that it informs residents and visitors of community events and provides one localized place for all organizations and businesses to announce their events. The Task Force members know the Calendar is of value because as people in the area have noticed the Calendar, more announcements have been received.

Passport Card

The passport card will encourage residents and visitors to get out and explore all Big Lake has to offer. The card is available on the Big Lake Passport webpage (www.biglakechamber.com) or can be picked up at the Chamber of Commerce office. Anyone who attends the events announced on the community calendar or the passport program webpage is able to mark on the card their attendance and participation. The card can be submitted to the Chamber of Commerce office where it will be placed in a monthly drawing. Prizes will come from area businesses.

The Big Lake Passport Program will create a sense of community by encouraging residents and visitors to participate in events and learn about Big Lake.

Additional Information

- Big Lake Passport Program
www.biglakechamber.com
passport@izoom.net